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ABSTRACT

This booklet outlines the California state guidelines for writing which assert that students should be carefully taught to read and compose many types of discourse to prepare them for higher education, the job market, and citizenship in democracy. The booklet summarizes the purposes for which the California Assessment Program (CAP) was developed, i.e., to: (1) set high standards for writing through a wide-range achievement test; (2) guide students through a variety of thinking and writing processes; (3) place particular attention on making good writing instruction available to all students; (4) allow for the monitoring of progress from year to year at school, district, and state levels; (5) require less time for testing a variety of writing types through the use of matrix sampling; (6) expose students to many types of writing situations; and (7) offer state-of-the-art, teacher-developed instructional materials. The booklet describes the types of essays which eighth and twelfth graders are expected to write; the collaborative efforts of the English-Language Arts Assessment Advisory Committee and the CAP Writing Development Team; the process of "prompt" development and selection; the state-of-the-art measurement system; the three-tiered reporting system; the creation of the "Writing Assessment Handbook"; and the future goals of CAPs English-Language Arts Assessment Committee. Two sample student essays are included. (PRA)

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If one were to imagine an effective statewide writing assessment designed to improve writing instruction in the public schools, certain criteria would immediately come to mind.

Such an assessment would:

raise standards and expectations for achievement in writing . . .

place teachers at its center to create assessment materials, score essays and teach other teachers how to use results . . .

reflect decades of research on effective writing instruction . . .

provide practical materials and staff development activities to help teachers implement the new standards . . .

*California leads the way!*

*"As a*
*British educator*
*once said,*
*'WYTIWYG—*
*What*
*you test*
*is*
*what*
*you get.'"*

FRANCIE ALEXANDER
Associate Superintendent
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment,
California State Department of Education

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# introduction

*"California's writing assessment responds to demands of a complex society such as ours that requires adults to be able to communicate effectively through the written word. It is necessary not only to succeed in a competitive job market, but also to fulfill the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. We have developed a writing assessment that ensures that the needs of students preparing for the twenty-first century are being met."*

Superintendent of Public Instruction

## CALIFORNIA'S WRITING ASSESSMENT— PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW

In the spirit of educational reform, the California Assessment Program (CAP) in the spring of 1987 launched the state's first writing assessment, involving essays from 268,719 eighth grade students. The following year, the assessment expanded to include grade twelve, and the total number of participating students in both grades rose to 492,721. Grades three and six will be added in the next few years.

The new assessment reflects the philosophy of the *English-Language Arts Framework; English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight;* and *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve.* Simply put, state guidelines assert that students should be carefully taught to read and compose many types of discourse to prepare them for higher education, the job market, and citizenship in a democracy.

The successful development of CAP's writing assessment required several consecutive years of commitment from teachers, curriculum consultants, and administrators from the kindergarten through grade twelve system; English professors from colleges and universities; testing professionals; CAP staff members; representatives from the California Writing Project and the California Literature Project; and other specialists.

At the heart of this program is the CAP Writing Development Team, composed of teachers from across California selected for their classroom expertise. Their charge has been to develop teacher-targeted writing guides for each type of writing to be assessed, a scoring system using three separate scores, and a six-point rating scale to show distinct levels of achievement. All scoring guides are based on a scale of one to six, showing distinct levels of achievement in each writing type.

To help with implementation, instruction-focused handbooks for grade eight and grade twelve have been produced and distributed statewide. They feature a program overview, management guidelines, a section on students with special needs

nd the writing and scoring guides for ach type of writing. State conferences nd regional training sessions continue to rovide additional assistance to teachers nd administrators. Teachers in districts f all sizes and in geographic locations hroughout California have been involved n some aspect of the CAP writing assessent.

or the first year of participation at each rade level, students write essays in esponse to prompts that represent four ypes of writing. The second year, two nore types of writing are introduced, ith the final two added in the third year, naking a total of eight writing types.

coring essays for an assessment of this nagnitude is an enormous task. In 1987, udent essays were scored at four egional sites by 290 teachers in eight ays. Since then, the numbers of scoring tes and teachers involved have conued to increase.



## FIRST IN THE NATION

California's new writing assessment is unique in the nation for several reasons. Most other statewide programs are part of minimal competency testing and represent one type of writing. In contrast, the CAP writing assessment:

- sets high standards for writing through a wide-range achievement test that challenges the best students and at the same time enables all students to demonstrate their achievement in writing
- reflects a major goal of the *English-Language Arts Framework*—to guide all students through a variety of thinking and writing processes
- places particular attention on making good writing instruction available to all students, including minority students and those with special needs
- allows for the monitoring of progress from year to year at school, district, and state levels (individual scores are not provided)
- requires less time for testing a variety of writing types through the use of matrix sampling
- exposes students to many types of writing situations, better preparing them for higher education, the job market, and citizenship in a democracy
- offers state-of-the-art, teacher-developed instructional materials

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California Assessment Program

# WRITING ASSESSMENT

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# THINKING THROUGH WRITING

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# types of writing

**Research suggests that the finer points of writing, such as punctuation and subject-verb agreement, are learned best while students are engaged in extended writing that has the purpose of communicating a message to an audience.**

*Becoming a Nation of Readers*

## GRADE EIGHT TYPES OF WRITING

In 1987, eighth graders were asked to write one of four types of essays:

**Autobiographical Incident**—narration of a specific occurrence in a student's life, presenting it vividly and stating or implying its significance

**Evaluation**—judgment on the worth of an item—such as a book, movie, or consumer product—supported with reasons and evidence

**Problem Solution**—analysis of a specific problem, including proposals and arguments for a solution

**Report of Information**—objective presentation of data collected from observations and research to explain a phenomenon or concept

Nineteen eighty-eight saw the addition of:

**Firsthand Biography**—presentation of a person the writer knows well, including the significance of that person in the writer's life

**Story**—narration of a fictional story with a plot, characters, and scene

And in 1989, these completed the grade eight series:

**Observational Writing**—re-creation of a writer's perceptions of an experience (the writer's stance is that of observer rather than participant)

**Speculation About Causes or Effects**—conjecture about the causes or results of an event, trend, or phenomenon

**The eight types of writing for each grade level were selected on the basis of the following:**

- **Would California's best teachers of writing at a certain grade be likely to assign this type of writing? (emphasis of the best school writing programs)**
- **Would students be reading the type of writing by a particular**

*"The aim of any assessment should be to estimate abilities in the real world."*
INA MULLIS, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey





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**grade level? (students' reading experiences)**

- **Would students be ready developmentally to engage in a particular type of writing? (students' cognitive development)**
- **Would it be fair to expect students to compose this type of writing in a 45-minute testing period? (appropriateness for testing)**
- **Would a grade-level set of writing types appropriately follow an earlier set and at the same time prepare students for a later set? (curriculum sequence between grades three and twelve)**

## GRADE TWELVE TYPES OF WRITING

As in grade eight, at grade twelve the various types of writing allow students to write from personal experience, from information acquired in all subjects in the curriculum, and from literature.

In 1988, the writing types first introduced were:

**Autobiographical Incident**—narration of a specific occurrence in a student's life, presenting it vividly and stating or implying its significance

**Evaluation**—judgment on the worth of an item—such as a book, movie, or consumer product—supported with reasons and evidence

**Interpretation**—interpretation of a text or data supported by reasons and evidence

**Reflective Essay**—exploration of a personal reflection and ideas arising from a particular occasion (something observed, a book read, a movie seen)

In 1989, two more were included:

**Controversial Issue**—defense of a stand on a controversial issue, supported with sound reasoning and evidence

**Report of Information**—objective presentation of data collected from observations and research to explain a phenomenon or concept

And in 1990, the last two types will be:

**Observational Writing**—re-creation of a writer's perception of an experience

**Speculation About Causes or Effects**—conjecture about the causes or results of an event, trend, or phenomenon

*"Each type of writing to be assessed is widely recognized in the real world. A writing type is a social construct; it evolved over time to meet writers' needs in recurring and now familiar writing situations."*

CHARLES COOPER, U.C. San Diego

# *collaboration... prompts*

**For anyone to learn something for himself, he must first re-create it for himself.**

*Piaget*

## COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

California's writing assessment is the result of a collaborative effort by hundreds of educators. Their determination and concern with excellence has produced a state-of-the-art assessment.

**The English-Language Arts Assessment Advisory Committee** guides all CAP testing in the English-language arts. This committee is planning to incorporate a reading assessment with student-constructed responses into the writing assessment as part of an expanded, integrated English-language arts assessment for the '90s.

The outstanding teachers on **CAP's writing development teams,** including representatives of the California Literature Project and the California Writing Project, provide crucial leadership in test development, scoring, and staff development. The members are from a cross-section of geographical regions and constituencies throughout the state.

## ONLY THE BEST WILL DO

Once the types of writing were selected for grades eight and twelve, the rigorous and comprehensive process of prompt development and selection began. For this purpose, the Department of Education, in collaboration with Educational Testing Service, created a team of test developers, the CAP Writing Development Team. This group of extraordinary California classroom teachers were specially selected by the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and the Department of Education to provide leadership in test development and staff development activities.

Members of the CAP Writing Development Team create many prompts for each type of writing to be tested, but only the best survive. Each prompt is divided into two parts—a writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation orients students to the type of writing. It focuses students' thinking and planning and helps them anticipate problems they must solve and information they must generate as they write.

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*"The writing assessment is more than a test; it is a direct opportunity and challenge to state and district administrators to support the teacher-professionalism that will guide all of us in improving students' writing achievement."*

FRAN CLAGGETT, Consultant, Forestville, California

The directions for writing suggest requirements and features of the essay—without being prescriptive or formulaic. The directions provide a purpose for the essay, and they always mention readers, sometimes identifying a particular reader, at other times merely referring to the readers' expectations or needs.

Teacher and student responses to the prompts are central to the field-testing process. For example, in one early field test of prompts, the California Writing Project identified 80 outstanding teachers to participate in a field study. Each teacher gave two prompts to 50 students per prompt, helped students complete a questionnaire, reviewed the essays and questionnaires, conducted student interviews about the prompts and difficulties with them, summarized the information for each of the two essay topics, and returned the materials to the CAP Writing Development Team. All prompts continue to be field tested in this way, though now approximately 200 students write to each prompt.

Selection guidelines require each prompt used in the writing assessment to:

- invite the desired type of writing
- engage the thinking, problem-solving, composing, and text-making processes central to the type of writing
- be an assignment that teachers would want to give their students
- be challenging for many students and accessible to all
- produce interesting, not just proficient, writing
- be liked by many students

A renewal system allows for the introduction of a new set of prompts each year. Each proposed prompt is subjected to the same rigorous screening and refining process.

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**Reading and writing are complementary acts that remain unfinished until completed by their reciprocal.**

***Robert Scholes***

*"Whoever said 'Show me what you test and I'll show you what you value' was very wise indeed. The CAP writing assessment makes it clear that California values the thinking and composing processes of its citizens."*

MARY BARR, California Literature Project

# measuring

**The most effective way to teach writing is to teach it as a process of brainstorming, composing, revising, and editing.**

*What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning*
U.S. Department of Education

## STATE-OF-THE-ART MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Like the writing assessment itself, its scoring system is a unique, state-of-the-art model for the rest of the nation. The system generates three kinds of scores for each type of writing assessed and measures general as well as specific features. Each essay is scored for:

- **rhetorical effectiveness**—the special thinking and writing requirements for each type of writing (provides information about students' achievements in a particular writing situation without creating restrictions or formulas)
- **general feature**—a special feature of the type of writing being assessed, such as coherence, elaboration, or style (supplements the rhetorical effectiveness score)
- **conventions**—usage, mechanics, and spelling (reveals students' mastery of mechanical correctness apart from their thinking and composing skills)

Each of the three scores uses a rating system of one through six, with six being the highest. Teachers who participate in scoring first undergo rigorous training sessions to guide them in using the scoring system accurately and consistently.

*"Data emerging from the first two years of test results are pure gold."*
JIM GRAY, Executive Director, California Writing Project and National Writing Project





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# *reporting*

## THREE-TIERED REPORTING SYSTEM

CAP's writing assessment features several documents designed to report results and help those in districts and schools responsible for using that information to improve classroom instruction. As this assessment expands to new grades, similar materials written specifically for other levels will be produced.

The results of CAP's writing assessment are reported annually in three ways:

- a special narrative report to teachers and principals
- a school and district report designed for the public
- a state report that summarizes writing achievement results for California

*A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement* is the first to arrive at the school and is specifically directed to teachers. It reports the percentage of the school's students achieving at each rhetorical effectiveness, feature, and conventions score point for every type of writing assessed. This report is tailored to the information needs of principals and classroom teachers and not for comparison of schools or for other external comparisons.

This report is accompanied by sets of student essays, illustrating student achievement at each rhetorical effectiveness score point for the writing types assessed.

CAP's school and district report, *Survey of Academic Skills, Writing Achievement*, is designed for the public, for making district and school comparisons, and for charting year-to-year progress.

A state report completes the three-tiered system and contains California's writing achievement results for all types of writing assessed. It includes annotated illustrative essays; a comparison of achievement results among the types of writing; discussion of overall writing achievement results; year-to-year changes; and recommendations for teachers, administrators, parents, and teacher educators.

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**Clear thinking becomes clear writing; one can't exist without the other.**

***William Zinsser***

*"CAP's writing assessment has encouraged teachers to place a new emphasis on writing skills and schools to incorporate writing-across-the-curriculum programs. Those higher expectations for students will clearly result in greatly improved student achievement."*

THOMAS PAYZANT, Superintendent, San Diego City Schools

# assistance

*"Scores for schools that follow the state* English-Language Arts Framework *are going up. . . . This program is having phenomenal results for kids."*

MARILYN WHIRRY,
twelfth grade English teacher

♦

*"What CAP assesses is writing which reflects some of the different ways we think as we try to make sense of our world."*

MEL GRUBB,
Consultant for English-Language Arts,
Los Angeles County Office of Education



## SPECIAL ASSISTANCE

Because the new grade eight CAP writing assessment represents a major departure for the California Assessment Program, materials were developed to help districts prepare for the new writing test. To meet this practical need, CAP created a *Writing Assessment Handbook* for grade eight and one for grade twelve.

The handbooks were intended to serve many audiences within the educational community. They include a program overview for all audiences; management guidelines for administrators; a chapter on writing assessment and the curriculum for curriculum specialists, administrators, and teachers; a chapter on students with special needs; and transparency masters for workshops.

Most important, the handbooks include a writing guide for every type of writing assessed. Each guide provides practical information for teachers—a definition of the writing type, explanation of its importance and characteristics, exemplary student essays, one student's complete writing process, classroom writing assignments, a published example of the writing type, a list of readings within the writing type, and a rhetorical effectiveness scoring guide. These handbooks, mailed to every junior high or high school, have served as starting points for staff development workshops throughout the state.

Leadership in staff development to help teachers prepare for the CAP writing assessment has been provided by the CAP Writing Development Team, the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and county offices of education.

# *the future*

## A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

The *English-Language Arts Framework* and *Model Curriculum Standards for the English-Language Arts, Grades Nine Through Twelve* envision meaning-based English-language arts programs that engage students actively in writing and reflecting on literature and human experience.

Standard Number 25 of the *Model Curriculum Standards* states, "Assessment methods and tools should be aligned with the new emphasis

(1) in substance,

(2) in the integration of writing, comprehension, and speaking, and

(3) on contextual acquisition of vocabulary and technical skills."

The introduction of the CAP writing assessment at grades eight and twelve has been the first step in encouraging schools to meet that standard.

Expansion of the writing assessment to elementary grades is scheduled for 1990–91, following a development schedule that began in 1988–89. The ultimate goal is to transform the CAP writing assessment into an integrated English-Language Arts assessment at grades three, six, eight, and twelve to reflect California's *English-Language Arts Framework*. CAP's English-Language Arts Assessment Advisory Committee plans to assess (1) reading comprehension through student-constructed responses, and (2) multiple types of writing through student-generated essays. The committee also hopes eventually to assess oral language and collaborative learning activities through formats integrating reading and response to literature, writing, speaking, and listening.

*"A literacy of thoughtfulness is primarily a process of making meaning (not just receiving it) and negotiating it with others (not just thinking alone). It is fundamentally constructive and derives from a different set of notions about the nature of knowledge and the process of human learning."*

REXFORD BROWN,
Education Commission of the States,
Denver, Colorado

# *sample essays*

## STUDENT ESSAYS— A SAMPLE OF RESULTS

These essays illustrate exceptional achievement in two of the writing types assessed at grade eight.

### Story

*This one day started just as hundreds before it had. The cold light of the autumn sun slipped through the small barred window and fell on the bleak prison walls. The clamor of the prisoners awakening drifted through the halls, and the pungent odor of cafeteria food penetrated every nook and cranny. Yet through this hubbub, Rupert Jones slept soundly.*

*"Hey! You! Wake up in there!" A jailer beat upon the cell bars, rudely awakening Rupert. "It's time to get up, and if you don't, you ain't going nowhere."*

*The jailer was in an extremely bad mood. He did not like his job or any of the prisoners. He especially did not like the idea of letting criminals back into the streets. This opposition to parole stemmed from the fact that his youngest daughter had been killed by a man in this very jail. Every day when John, for that was the jailer's name, walked by this man's cell, he had a terrible longing to bash the man's face in. John had just passed the murderer's cell and he was taking his anger and hatred out on Rupert.*

*"I can't believe that the authorities are lettin' you out of this rat hole. No kid of mine is goin' out after dark if you's out there. You nasty, conniving scum, you is just a waiting to get out there and hurt someone. The law system in this country is goin' downhill if they let scum like you back on the street." Having said his say, John turned on his heel and stomped back down the hall.*

*But John's criticisms had fallen on empty ears. Many years ago, Rupert had learned to tune out someone who was talking, and he utilized this power whenever it was necessary. Instead of thinking of the jailer's harsh words, Rupert was day dreaming about what he would do as soon as he was released from the prison. He was just imagining himself taking a huge bite out of a juicy, delicious hamburger when his reverie was shattered by the clanking of the jailer's keys in the cell door's lock. Rupert slowly stood up and meandered down the hall to the cafeteria.*

*Rupert was an incredibly large man. He was not at all obese, but he was big boned, and he stood at 6'5". His face showed a hard and weathered look that came from ten years in jail. He was tough and seemingly mean, and he was disliked by all of his fellow criminals.*

*As Rupert masticated his breakfast he hardly noticed the gooey substance that he was shoveling into his mouth. He was once again caught up in his dream about the outside world. After ten years of jail for robbing a bank, Rupert knew that he was going to go straight and enjoy life for what it was.*

*After breakfast Rupert went back to his cell. Each minute seemed like hours..Finally, exactly at noon, the jailer's keys once again clanked in his lock. But this was the very last time he would hear that sound.*

*As he was escorted out of the jail, Rupert looked around himself in untarnished ecstasy. Then, right outside the gate, someone rushed to meet him. It was his mother, Alycia Jones. He grabbed her in a giant bear-hug, lifting her right off the ground. And then, the hard and weathered face broke. Rupert stood there under a flaming autumn tree, hugging his mother with tears rolling down his face.*

## Report of Information

*In our town there are many interesting and exciting things to do. This little town is bustling with activity from morning to night. There are hundreds of things to experience and see.*

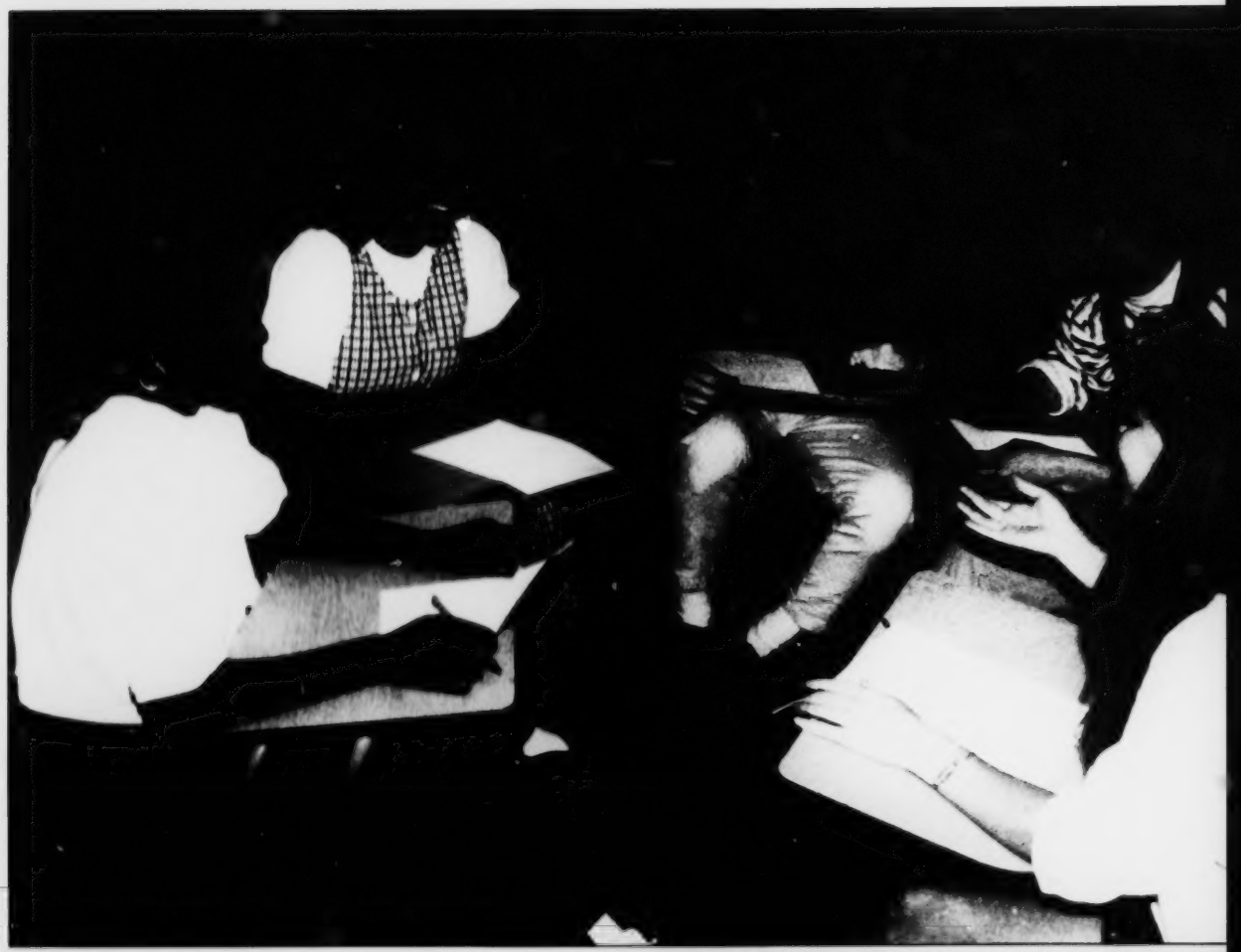
*If you live near Main Street, there is a lovely park between Crocker Bank and Ludwig's. T park is clean, safe, and well maintained. It h a lush, green lawn that stretches the entire length of the block and is surrounded by a w of well clipped London Plain trees. You can g to this park and play ball, rollerskate, ride bi cles, or just stroll around the edge of the tow*

*If you prefer shopping to sports and picnics, all along Main Street are quaint shops and boutiques. These shops have everything from sewing materials to candy. Things here are inexpensive and very useful. There is also a mall out toward the end of Oak Street. The mall has a large, well-run Macy's, a hair salon, a candy shop, a movie theater, and many other useful shops.*

*If you favor games and fun, there is an arcade on Mill St. The arcade has hundreds of games and prizes. It is lots of fun, and you can meet many interesting people there. If you aren't into playing arcade games, outside is miniature golf. The "golf" course consists of eighteen holes and prizes for getting "holes in one." The miniature golf course is very challenging but fun at the same time. It is supposed to be the best maintained and most difficult miniature golf course in the county.*

*Last but not least is the stable on River Drive. The stable is called Mr. Oak's Horse Barn by many locals. The Horse Barn has fifteen horses that you can take lessons on or rent for the day. If you take lessons, you will be instructed by a knowledgeable professional in basic or advanced horse care and riding. Should you rent a horse, you have the option of taking any one of the various bridle paths that wind up into the scenic Gavilan Mountains.*

*I hope you can use this guide to have many adventure filled days in lovely little Hollister.*



he writing process does not fit into teacher-led,
hole-class methods of instruction.

*ucy McCormick Calkins*

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